

Promising Practice: Incentives Program
Gateway Technical College
Health Professions Opportunity Program (HPOP)

The Gateway HPOP offers several mutually reinforcing approaches to help participants along “the HPOP journey”: helping students meet program requirements; recognizing and rewarding excellent participation, attendance, and academic success; and enabling students to earn points redeemable toward valuable supportive benefits through the incentive program. Students beginning on the HPOP journey initially receive the student handbook, which describes the program requirements that participants must meet, such as the meetings and workshops they must attend. Through attendance at these meetings and workshops or achievement of specific benchmarks, participants accumulate a specified number of points for each completed activity. These points can then be utilized monthly to purchase incentives. Gateway’s incentive program and policy was reviewed and approved by the awarding agency before implementation of the program. The grantee gained approval by: working closely with the awarding agency; providing a clearly outlined policy with incentives closely tied to programmatic goals and student support; and identifying incentives that were allowable and reasonable.

Students are eligible for this program while they are enrolled in the school program, and eligibility terminates once they obtain employment. A point list of incentives is provided to students so that they are aware of the incentives available (items such as diapers, hygiene products, school supplies, cleaning supplies, gas cards, etc.) and the cost of each of these incentives in points. In order to apply points toward a specific incentive choice, a student fills out an incentive request form and submits that form to his or her HPOP program specialist. The program specialist fills the student order and the student returns later to collect the incentive.

To make the incentive program relevant and meaningful to students, HPOP director Stacia Thompson says, “It is imperative to interview students to determine which items they would most like to earn. Recently, a popular incentive has been energy cards that can be redeemed with local energy providers. Some students have found it difficult to meet rising energy costs, and the energy cards have helped them pay their household energy bills.”

For other grantees considering starting an incentive program, in addition to surveying students to determine which items they prefer as incentives, it is necessary to determine the budget allotment needed to cover the program. For example, Gateway had to factor into its budget the \$50 price of the energy cards and the months of the year in which they would receive greater numbers of requests for the cards. During seasons other than winter, Gateway tends to receive more requests for energy assistance because then local energy companies have more leeway to shut off a customer’s power during this season than they do during the winter months, when consumer protections are in effect.

Once budget considerations have been addressed, it is imperative to set guidelines about the process through which incentives are obtained. For example, Gateway specifies in the student handbook that the student must participate in certain meetings and workshops, complete an

incentive request form, and submit this form to the program specialist. Reward points can only be redeemed for items on the menu list and cannot be redeemed for cash. Also, the handbook specifies that incentive requests must be made during the first week of each month.

As a result of the incentives offered in the Gateway HPOP journey, student participation at workshops has increased dramatically, and students have given positive satisfaction scores on workshops attended. A recent positive outcome noted is that 30 percent of the HPOG participants had attended a workshop series. Many students indicated they enjoyed the workshops they participated in because they not only earned points toward valuable and necessary products but also obtained a wealth of information by attending workshops that they might not have attended if incentives hadn't been offered. In addition, they made social contacts with the other participants during these events, resulting in an informal cohort of HPOG participants.

The courses students are required to participate in include subjects such as diversity, resume writing, dressing for success, interview skills, and nutrition. A sample of the Gateway incentive program follows:

100 percent attendance/week	10 Reward Points
2.0 GPA per academic term	20 Reward Points
3.0 GPA per academic term	30 Reward Points
Complete Strengthquest assessment	10 Reward Points
Attend HPOP workshops	10 Reward Points
Attend face-to-face meetings with HPOP specialist	10 Reward Points
Successful completion of Health Care Occupations Certificate	200 Reward Points
Academic success (recognized by Dean's List)	100 Reward Points